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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005366

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP
DEFENSE FOR OSD/ISA (POWERS)
NSC FOR MORROW
PACOM FOR FPA HUSO

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SUBJECT: THAI MFA EMBRACES CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC DIALOGUE TO
BE CALLED "THAI-U.S. DIALOGUE"

REF: LAMBERT-HIGGINS EMAILS

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, Reason 1.4 (a and d)

1. (C) Summary. The Thai MFA embraces the concept of a U.S.-Thai Strategic Dialogue -- seeing it as a way to strengthen the bilateral relationship in accord with PM Thaksin's call for an "Action Plan" with the United States. MFA proposes hosting a two day session to take place in early November. The Thai agree U.S. participants should include representatives from the Department, OSD, NSC, JCS and PACOM and envision the Thai side will be led by MFA and include officials from MOD, NSC, the National Intelligence Agency, Royal Thai Supreme Command and the military services. The Thai are comfortable with agenda topics suggested by Washington and may add a few items of their own, possibly to include exploring holding separate discussions on Global Issues. MFA is also interested in working with us to develop a common media plan. End Summary.

ON BOARD WITH THE DIALOGUE

2. (C) On August 19, PolCouns met with MFA DG for American and South Pacific Affairs Nongnuth Phecharatana, DDG Medha Promthep, Director Amornsate Singha and their staff to discuss Washington's proposal to hold bilateral strategic talks. Nongnuth said that the MFA embraces the concept of the talks as a practical way to enhance the relationship. She pointed to perennial problems the Thai bureaucracy has with stove piping and suggested that one benefit of the Dialogue would be bringing all of the Thai agencies with a stake in strategic issues together to share opinions and develop a common strategy with the United States. Nongnuth said that two days after the Prime Minister's recent meeting in Phuket with the Secretary, he had gone on national radio to discuss his goal of implementing an "Action Plan" with the United States. This Dialogue, she suggested, would be the cornerstone of an Action Plan aimed at enhancing the relationship. She agreed that we should strive to make the Dialogue informal to foster discussion and to develop relationships among the participants.

TIMING

3. (C) As expected, Nongnuth said that the Thai military would not be able to attend a Dialogue meeting in early October -- dates originally proposed by Washington -- due to the annual military reshuffle underway. She suggested that early November, well before APEC, would be better and promised to provide a counterproposal soon.

A NEW NAME -- THAI-U.S. DIALOGUE

4. (C) Nongnuth noted that the word "strategic" might have unwanted connotations within the Thai media and wondered whether the "Thai-U.S. Dialogue" might be a name less likely to foster misunderstanding. PolCouns said that our side would try to be flexible in choosing a name and promised to seek guidance from Washington.

AGENDA -- LOOKS OK BUT LET'S BE FLEXIBLE

5. (C) PolOff also shared with Nongnuth some possible agenda topics ranging from "Regional Security Issues and the growing role of neighboring countries" and "Sharing ideas on how to make ASEAN more effective" to "the Future of Cobra Gold -- building on our success" and "Working together to improve PKO training." Nongnuth said that these topics seemed ripe for discussion. She asked whether the U.S. would support our jointly developing an agenda for public consumption in which topics like Burma could be disguised under the general heading of "Regional Issues" and a more detailed confidential agenda where we could spell out agenda items in detail.

6. (C) Nongnuth added that the RTG would likely have additional agenda topics to add. One topic she supported would be a discussion to explore arranging a future meeting on Global Affairs, perhaps to include the participation of

U/S Dobriansky and her staff and counterparts from selected ASEAN member countries, to discuss topics such as Avian Flu, HIV/AIDS, deforestation, trafficking in persons, CITES, Global Climate Change, etc. Such a meeting could further enhance our bilateral cooperation and could be another feature of Thaksin's "Action Plan" to enhance the bilateral relationship.

PARTICIPATION

17. (C) Nongnuth was pleased that the U.S. delegation would be led by the DAS responsible for SE Asian affairs and could include participation by OSD, NSC, JCS, the Embassy and PACOM. She said that the Thai side would probably be led by the MFA and include representatives from MOD, NSC, National Intelligence Agency, Royal Thai Supreme Command and the military services. She hoped that the head of delegation would be MFA PermSec, Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn -- but noted that his participation was not yet confirmed.

MEDIA APPROACH

18. (C) DG Nongnuth agreed that certain fringes of the Thai media might misinterpret the Dialogue, and seemed open to the idea of developing jointly a media plan that could include press backgrounders by MFA and the Embassy that could be disseminated to Thai journalists.

BOYCE